



The fantastic (Turkish) Brown Fish Owl - our bird-of-the-trip (all photos in this report taken on this tour by Pete Morris)

TURKEY, GEORGIA & CYPRUS

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After a very enjoyable return to this part of the world in 2019, I was not expecting to be back again so soon! I was however more than happy to be back, as Spring in this part of the world is one of my favourite birding experiences anywhere. And not only that... we'd bolted on Georgia too, just to add a more complete 'Ottoman' endemics experience.

Our trip this year was cooler than usual, with a relatively cold and wet Spring in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since my earlier visits, the infrastructure has improved massively! The roads are now very good for most of the tour, the cities have got a little bigger and you no longer have to walk up Demirkazik (you can go up in a 4WD!!). In addition, our bird of the trip, the Turkish Brown Fish Owl has become available in recent years, though this year took a lot more effort to see. The people are as friendly and welcoming as ever, and overall, it's a fabulous birding destination. In our couple of weeks travelling around we found nearly all of the east Mediterranean species that we had hoped for, recording a total of nearly 280 species and had a brilliant time to boot. The high-



Part of the amazing flock of Rosy Starlings that we encountered on our last afternoon in Georgia.

lights of our tour were many and varied. In Georgia we of course loved the Caucasian Grouse and Caucasian Snowcock as well as the much-wanted Caucasian Great Rosefinch, a pair of Eastern Imperial Eagles and an amazing flock of thousands of Rosy Starlings, as well as unexpected Brown Bears and Eurasian Lynx! On Cyprus we enjoyed great views of the endemics, Cyprus Scops Owl, Cyprus Warbler and Cyprus Wheatear, and enjoyed a number of other great species including Black Francolin, Spectacled Warbler, Masked and Lesser Grey Shrikes, and wonderful Black-headed Buntings. On mainland Turkey, another set of species entertained. Top of the billing was the superb Turkish Brown Fish Owl, but other great birds included Caspian Snowcock, See-see Partridge, Pallid Scops Owl, the rare White-backed Woodpecker, stunning Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Upcher's, Olive-tree and Rüppell's Warblers, Finsch's Wheatear, White-throated Robin, Krüper's Nuthatch, Desert Finch, Pale Rockfinch, Cinereous Bunting, and the gorgeous Cretzschmar's Bunting. And that's just to name a few!

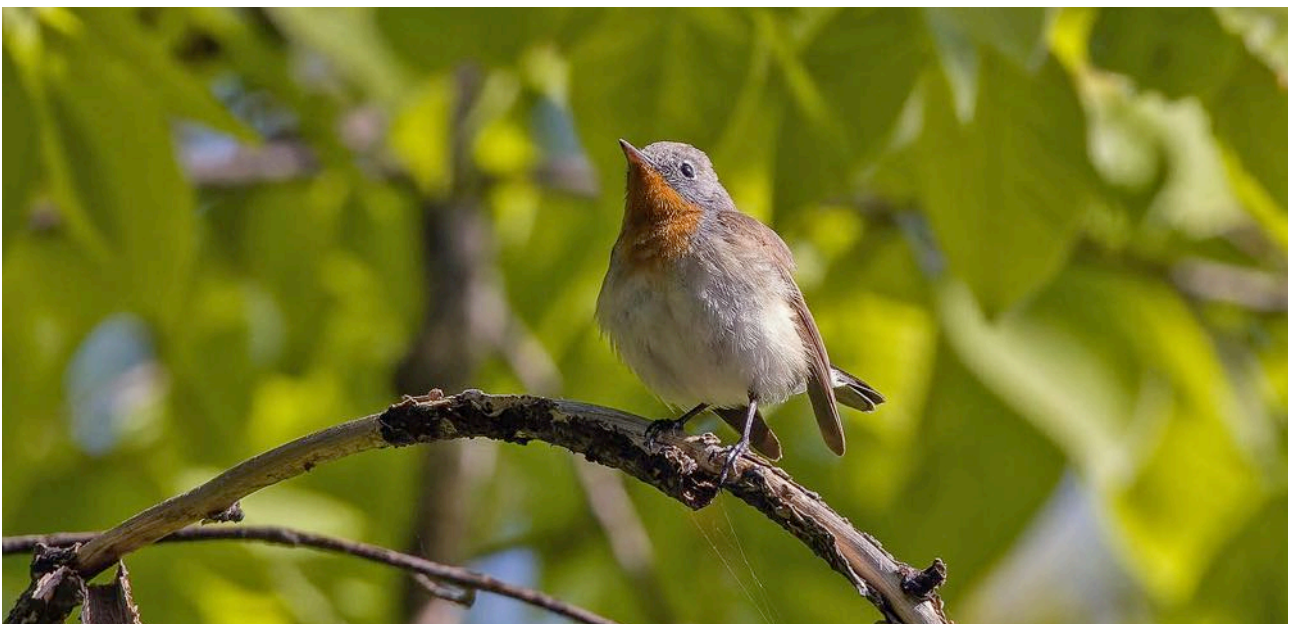


Gorgeous Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters at their colony in Eastern Turkey



Spectacular mountain scenery at Stepantsminda

We began the 'High Caucasus of Georgia' section of the tour, in the wee small hours, at Tbilisi Airport. We started heading northwards along the Georgian Military Highway towards the snow-capped peaks of the central Caucasus, with a much needed coffee stop on the way. The first thing that struck us was the huge lines of trucks lining the side of the road, that went on for literally miles and miles and must have contained thousands of trucks. Clearly displaced traffic as a result of the grim war in Ukraine, a war which is sadly still going on as I type. Our first roadside stop gave us a few common species, but it felt like we were birding in a busy car park, and we soon moved on. Further along the road we stopped in a steep area of woodland where we managed to find singing Green Warbler, a key target. It obliged for a while, and then melted back into the woods. We then searched long and hard, eventually finding a 2cy male Semicollared Flycatcher, which again was hard to keep tabs on. Other species present included Hawfinch and a fine male Red-breasted Flycatcher.



A fine male Red-breasted Flycatcher from our first morning in Georgia



The localized Caucasian form of Mountain Chiffchaff was very showy.

As we started to ascend, we made another stop where we found a singing male (Caucasian) Mountain Chiffchaff and some amazing scenery, something we were going to have to get used to! The winding road took us high up over the icy Jvari Pass previously known in Soviet times as the Krestovyy Pass, though roadworks held us up for a while around the highest point where we managed to find a Horned Larks of the distinctive *penicillata* subspecies, together with some (Caucasian) Twite, Ring Ouzel of the *amicorum* subspecies, and Water Pipit of the distinctive Caucasian subspecies *coutellii*. We then pressed on to our comfortable and extremely friendly hotel in Stepantsminda, formerly known as Kazbegi in Soviet times. Kazbegi used to be a regular Birdquest destination in the 1980s and early 1990s, and inevitably there have been some changes in the wake of the political upheavals nearly two decades ago, but the modern hotel is a welcome innovation, and indeed Georgia itself is a modern and friendly country.

After lunch and a short rest, we quickly headed up to the base of the cliffs at the edge of the valley for some more birding. We scanned and listened and it really did not take too long to hear the distinctive cries of one of our main quarryies, and soon we had the first smart Caucasian Snowcock teed up in the scope. We then moved down a little, adding Whinchat, Green Toads and a Northern Goshawk, and then explored an adjacent valley. Here we very soon had the scopes trained on stunning Caucasian Grouse and a Bearded Vulture or two, whilst



The smart Caucasian Snowcock showed very well - thanks for the use of the lens Eduardo!



Stunning views of Bearded Vultures was a feature of our visit to the Caucasus.

more Mountain Chiffchaffs sang from the scrub. It had been an excellent start, but with the fine weather, we knew that the other mountain specialities had probably moved far up the mountain!

The following day, most of us made the long, slow and arduous walk from 2150m up to the snow line at 2950m. This was primarily to look for the Caucasian form of Great Rosefinch and Gldenstdt's Redstart, neither of which we were able to find, despite much effort! It was a fabulous walk through astounding scenery, and we did see plenty more Caucasian Grouse (and watched them displaying), more Caucasian Snowcock and, best of all, a mother Brown Bear and two cubs. We also found our first Alpine Accentors and Red-fronted Serins, had amazing views of Bearded and Griffon Vultures, and saw a few migrants including a fabulous Yellow-headed (*lutea*) Yellow Wagtail with a (Blue-headed) Yellow Wagtail, many vocal European Bee-eaters, a male Pallid Harrier, and, perhaps best of all, a couple of Levant Sparrowhawks. After a long and tiring walk we headed down for an early dinner and well-deserved beer or two!

The following day we explored the slopes on the opposite side of the valley. Early morning scanning produced excellent views of a relatively close Caucasian Snowcock, and, even better, a fabulous Eurasian Lynx which wandered across the grassy slopes, treating us to prolonged views as it was maybe tracking a group of East Caucasian Tur. The rest of the morning we hunted the slopes and buckthorn scrub for rosefinches, but without



Two rarely seen mammals from Stepantsminda: a mother Brown Bear and her two cubs, and a fantastic Eurasian Lynx.



Migrant Western Yellow Wagtails are always great to see. This is the seldom seen lutea, 'Yellow-headed' Wagtail

success. We did find a fine singing male Common Rosefinch, excellent Common Rock Thrushes, plenty of Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, and more Caucasian Grouse and Snowcocks, but eventually headed back down to the cars. We then headed north and ate our picnic lunch at a monastery close to the Russian border. We scanned for raptors, and although a few Levant Sparrowhawks, Black Kites, Common (Steppe) Buzzards and Montagu's Harriers were passing over, they were mostly very distant. So we returned to Stepantsminda, with similar results, though some of the birds were a little closer, and we added Cinereous Vulture and a Common Crane. We finished the day in a broad valley with good mixed flocks of Western Yellow Wagtails (including Grey-headed and Sykes's), Little Ringed Plovers, Rooks and the excellent local form of Long-tailed Tit.



A lovely migrant male Red-throated Pipit, brought down by the rain

The forecast for the following morning was not good, and indeed we awoke to heavy and persistent rain. We tried a few spots, and it was clear birds were being disrupted by the weather. A fine Red-throated Pipit was by the car park, Black Redstarts and Water Pipits were everywhere and the mountains were turning white! We turned our attention to the opposite side of the valley and miraculously, Simon picked up some Caucasian Great Rosefinches a long way up slope. As soon as we had begun to look at them and get people on to them, they took flight! Eighteen of them, over our heads and up, up and away. This called for a swift response, and we followed in the direction they may have gone, and miraculously, about 2km later, we refound them, and everyone enjoyed some great views in the rain, which was getting heavier by the minute!! There was another problem too. The bus was miles away and up hill! Fortunately, I had a plan, and one good turn leads to another. I had tipped off my friend Chris about the rosefinches, and as they arrived on their bus, we handed them the rosefinches, and they kindly sent their bus up the hill with us to reunite us with our vehicles. Now that's what you call team work!

A little cold and wet, but delighted with our success, we began to drive south, drying out and warming up as we went. As we climbed back over the pass it was nearing white-out conditions, and we were pleased to get over to the other side! After a lunch and hot drinks we headed to Tbilisi where the weather was fast improving. Our first stops by a large reservoir yielded some impressive flocks of gulls, with numerous smart Armenian Gulls, as well as Caspian Gulls, and both Baltic and Heuglin's Lesser Black-backed Gulls. A few other water birds were



We spent some time looking at Armenian Gulls in Georgia, and enjoyed a fine pair of Eastern Imperial Eagles.



present, but we decided to head on to Kumisi Reservoir, where a whole new set of birds were waiting for us! As the sun began to shine and the air warmed we crossed areas of steppe where Calandra Larks and Isabelline Wheatears were present. Roadside Rock Sparrows and Eastern Black-eared Wheatears were appreciated, Crested Larks were everywhere and an Eastern Imperial Eagle drifted over. As we arrived at the lake we were greeted by throngs of waterbirds. Ruddy Shelducks, Red-crested Pochards and Garganeys shared the open water with a group of Red-necked Phalaropes. Flocks of White-winged and a few Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns hawked over the surface, and the edges were populated by an excellent variety of waders, mostly in summer plumage, including Kentish Plovers, a Collared Pratincole and a fine Marsh Sandpiper. Of course this concentration of birds attracted raptors too, with a fine adult White-tailed Eagle and several hawking Eurasian Hobbies being the pick of the bunch, whilst a Golden Jackal made a nuisance of itself at the back of the lake! Our attention was also drawn to a tightly bunched mobile flock which, as I suspected it would, morphed into a flurry of pink, and luckily for us landed in the strangely abandoned village. Spending time with thousands of glorious Rosy Starlings was most certainly a highlight of the tour, and as we watched, our first Egyptian Vulture drifted over. By now it was getting late, and we headed back towards Tbilisi, though we did stop and get some brilliant views of two Eastern Imperial Eagles by their nest, even watching them copulate. Another great day!



Another view of the brilliant flock of Rosy Starlings in Georgia.

The following morning we were up early, watching Laughing Doves in the car park before heading to the airport, ending our excellent short visit to Georgia. Two flights later and we found ourselves in Ercan, just on the northern Turkish side of Cyprus, from where we made the short transfer to our base for the next few nights, on the outskirts of Girne. We made a couple of stops along the way. The first was in a lovely area of maquis in the hills above Ercan. Here we found the first two of the endemics the attractive Cyprus Warbler and the interesting Cyprus Wheatear, giving its weird song. We also popped into a nearby reservoir, though the water levels were particularly high. We did manage to see a few waterbirds, including Purple Heron and a few Black-crowned Night Herons as well as our first subtle but showy Eastern Olivaceous Warbler. Later that evening we made a brief nocturnal excursion, but without success other than a fine Lilith (Little) Owl right by the hotel.

We had two full days to explore the northern half of the island, and during that period we enjoyed largely fine weather. The lovely weather, made it a pleasant all round experience, but was not conducive to big numbers of migrants! During our time we explored areas close to our hotel, several wetlands, both the northeast and northwest capes, and the more hilly areas further inland.



A fabulous male Cyprus Warbler, one of the stars of the island.

On our first morning we headed west to the Kormakitis Peninsula, but made a stop near to Girne on the way. Here we were delighted to find our missing endemic, the smart Cyprus Scops Owl, initially peering at us from a dense green shrub, and then out in the open! Out at the peninsula, we were immediately struck by the endless streams of European Bee-eaters and hirundines (including several Red-rumped Swallows) that were passing overhead. It was a truly phenomenal spectacle as literally thousands and thousands were heading to the end of the peninsula and on across the Mediterranean. Also present were a couple of Yelkouan Shearwaters and European Shags, whilst the nearby scrub yielded large flocks of Spanish Sparrows, numerous Sardinian Warblers (a species that is apparently displacing the endemic Cyprus Warbler from some of its breeding haunts), and a couple of Spectacled Warblers, whilst the nearby fields held flocks of Blue-headed and Black-headed Wagtails that were joined by a couple of Red-throated Pipits and a Greater Short-toed Lark, and we also found a couple of skittish Eurasian Stone-curlews and some high-flying Zitting Cisticolas. The taller bushes a little



A lovely Cyprus Scops Owl peering at us from its daytime hideaway.



A fabulous endemic Cyprus Wheatear, the lovely feldegg 'Black-headed' Yellow Wagtail and the much-appreciated Black Francolin.



further inland held delightful Red-backed, Masked and Woodchat Shrikes, as well as a skittish Barred Warbler, a female Pied and a couple of Spotted Flycatchers, small numbers of European Turtle Doves, Eurasian Golden Orioles, and a few European Serins. As we headed back to the base of the peninsula, a fine light-morph Eleonora's Falcon drifted over, rounding off the morning nicely.

We then bought some food, headed for the hills, and enjoyed a fine picnic in the shady pine forest. In the afternoon we explored some rather odorous wetlands where highlights included smart Ferruginous Ducks, fine Squacco Herons, noisy Black-winged Stilts and Spur-winged Plovers, and a variety of waders including numerous Little Stints and a couple of Temminck's Stints. We also saw our first Glossy Ibises and a Greater Flamingo. In the nearby open areas we came across our first smart European Rollers, more Eurasian Stone-curlews, cracking Black Francolins and a couple of Chukars.

The following day we headed for the excellent Kuprulu Wetlands. These were teeming with life, with excellent numbers of ducks and waders, including numerous Garganeys, Northern Shovelers with ducklings (an unusual breeding record), Gadwall, Ringed Plovers, Curlew Sandpipers and Collared Pratincoles, as well as at least 50 Greater Flamingos. In the surrounding vegetation, we found Great and (Caspian) European Reed Warblers, Cetti's Warblers and, nearby, another Spectacled Warbler. Nearby, more Eurasian Stone-curlews, a Spectacled Warbler, Calandra Larks, a Montagu's Harrier and our first White Stork were added before we headed further east. More wetlands yielded more Ferruginous Ducks but not too much more, and we then headed further east to the Karpaz Peninsula. Heading out along the narrow and bumpy road, we found our first Black-headed



Nightlife around our Cyprus resort! Another Cyprus Scops Owl, a Eurasian Nightjar and a 'Lilith' Little Owl.



Buntings, whilst out at the cape, we found our first Long-legged Buzzard, a few Scopoli's Shearwaters and a couple of excellent Audouin's Gulls. Heading back we paused to admire a Blue Rock Thrush and some Alpine Swifts, and also found time to enjoy more Cyprus Wheatears and Cyprus Warblers. In the evening we went out locally and enjoyed great views of Eurasian Nightjar, and for those that stayed out later, more Cyprus Scops Owls and a Long-eared Hedgehog.



The superb travertine terraces at Pamukkale - a brief distraction from the birds!

After a fine stay in our pleasant hotel (albeit with the nightly battle for dinner!), we left Cyprus with just about all of what we had hoped to see. After an early rise, we were up early and checking in for our flight across to Izmir, though were somewhat delayed by the fog. We found our new vehicles and headed for our destination, Pamukkale.

We may not have consisted of a group of total culture vultures, but we were not going to miss out on a visit to the cultural sites at Pamukkale, and we arrived in good time. Upon arrival spent a couple of lovely hours wondering around the area. Pamukkale, means “cotton castle” in Turkish and is famous for the amazing white travertine cascades that resemble frozen waterfalls, and terraces of shallow pools that were created by the waters of thermal springs reacting with the air. Its allure was first noticed by the Romans and the magnificent Hierapolis ancient city was established near the travertine by them. The unique travertine terraces and the ancient ruins have lead to the site being enlisted by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. As well as the scenic and historic wonders, there were of course a few birds too, including a most unexpected vagrant Pied Wheatear as well as our first Eastern Orphean Warblers, more lovely Black-headed Buntings, and some fine Western Rock Nuthatches. We also noted a Black Stork passing over.



Eastern Black-eared Wheatear and Eastern Orphean Warbler at Pamukkale.



A couple more stunners... a male Cretzschmar's Bunting and a surprise male Pied Wheatear.



We headed out on a pre-breakfast excursion the following morning to some adjacent habitat. Here we found more cracking Black-headed Buntings, singing Cretzschmar's Buntings and our first Cirl Buntings but were unable to find the rare and erratically occurring western form of Cinereous Bunting, despite much effort. We then moved on, but rather than take the direct route, we decided to make a detour past a few additional wetland areas. The landscape was soon changing, and before too long we were out into some salt plains where Isabel-line Wheatears suddenly became common! As soon as we reached some attractive hillsides we paused once more. Cretzschmar's Buntings again serenaded us, and soon we were watching charming White-throated Robins in all their glory. We were then equally excited to get some brilliant views of the stunning Rüppell's Warbler! Birding in Turkey really is that good! We continued on and once we found water, more birds were present including our only Common Shelducks and first Pied Avocets, whilst further on we found Ruddy Shelducks and distant Slender-billed Gulls. It was a rather long and adventurous drive, and we eventually arrived at Side early in the evening.



More Turkish beauties: Black-headed Bunting, the lovely Rüppell's Warbler and the stunning White-throated Robin (or Irania).



The following morning we decided to head up into the picturesque foothills, below the town of Akseki, birding in some wonderful mixed woodland and olive groves. Soon after we parked the vehicle, the songs of Eastern Bonelli's Warblers rang through the air, and very soon we were watching this localized speciality which performed very well after a bit of effort. Also present was a surprise Wood Warbler, and we were delighted to find both Lesser Spotted and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers. Just along the road we found another cracker, the superb Krüper's Nuthatch. We then embarked on a meandering walk through the olive groves. Many of our familiar friends were present with stunning Masked Shrikes and Cretzschmar's Buntings and we added a pair of Sombre Tits to our excellent list of special birds. Another fine pair of Middle Spotted Woodpeckers and a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at the nest were also seen, but we failed to track down our big target, Olive-tree Warbler, which seemed to not yet be on territory.

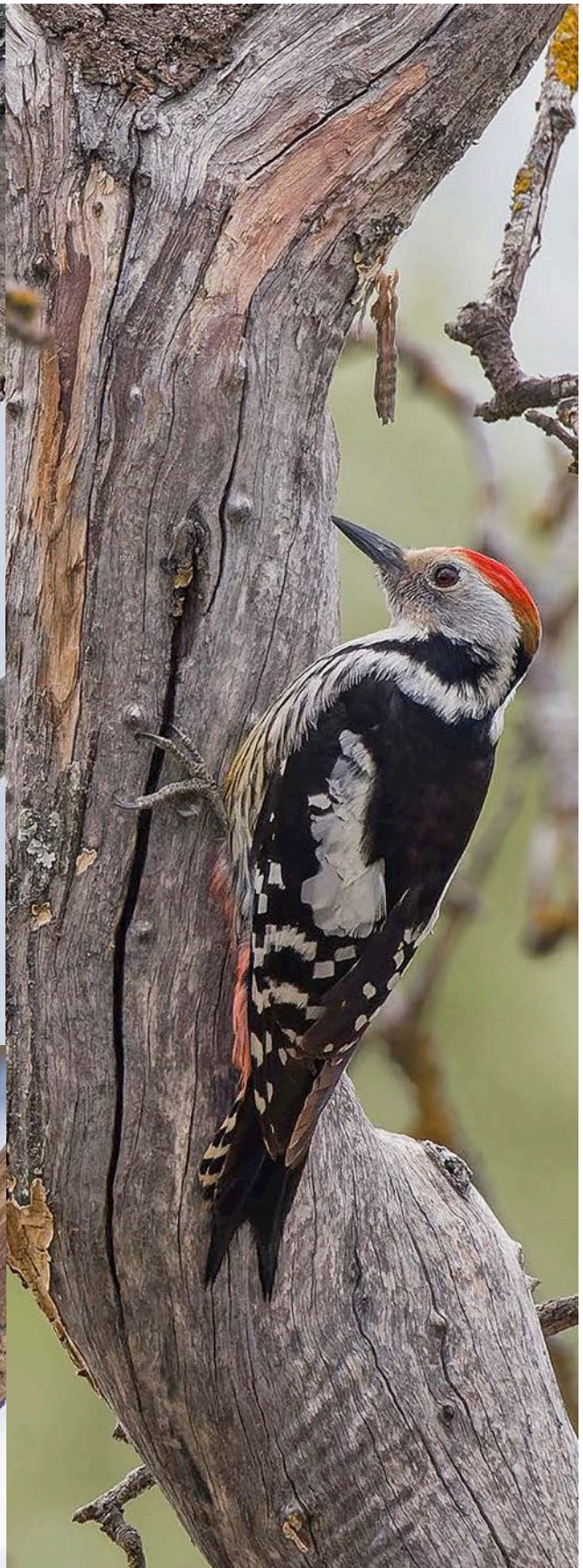
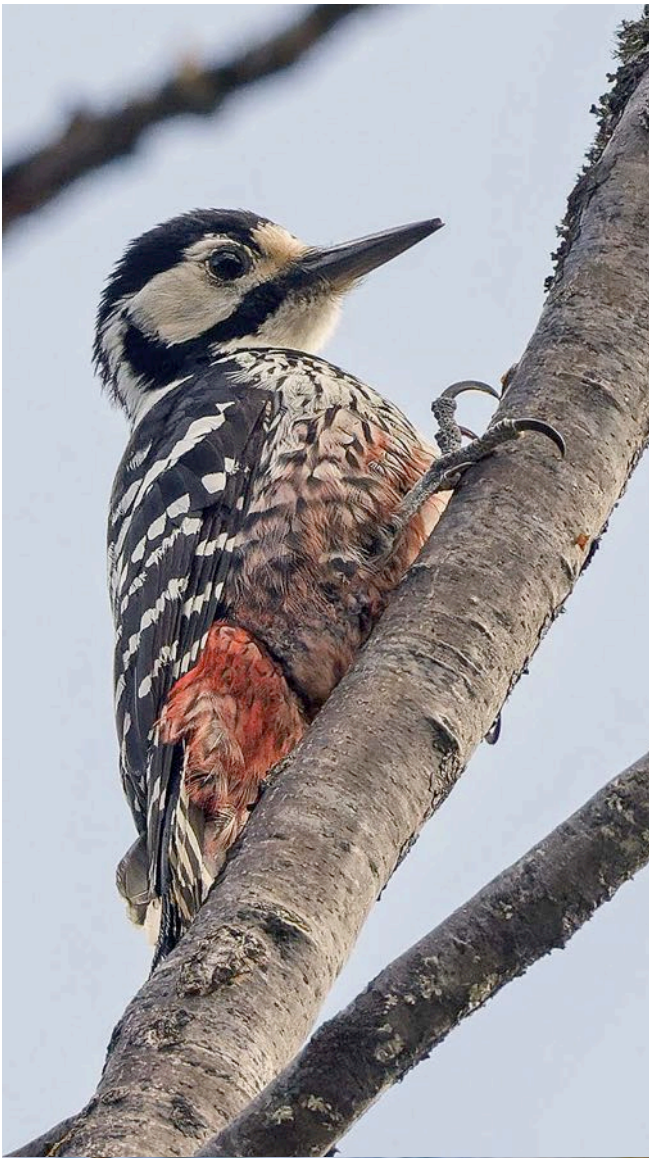


Masked Shrikes showed well many times. One of the world's best shrikes!

After a pause for lunch and a break, we headed for the coast. It was pretty quiet on the coast, but we focused our attention on a couple of new species for the trip, successfully adding both Delicate Prinia (split from Graceful) and a very smart pair of Rufous Scrub Robins. We also found our first Little Bittern and White-spectacled Bulbuls, and heading back, added our first, of what turned out to be many, Lesser Grey Shrikes.

We headed back for dinner and then embarked upon a lengthy post dinner excursion. The regular fish owls, that were gettable in the day time in recent years, seem to have disappeared since covid, and as a result we had to resort to plan b! After a long drive up into the hills, on what was a cool and windy night, we found ourselves wandering up and down a river, spotlighting trees with nothing visible in them! As eyelids began to droop and spirits fade, our dogmatic local guide found our quarry, and there in the torch was a magnificent (Turkish) Brown Fish Owl. Relief and elation, we watched this stunning creature for a good while before heading back to Side. On the way back we added a fine Eurasian Scops Owl, and a couple of Eastern European Hedgehogs, but it was the wee small hours by the time we hit the pillow!

After such a late finish, we decided to head for Akseki's pine forests after a late breakfast. Lovely though it was, the birding was slow and although we found Goldcrests, Coal Tits, numerous Krüper's Nuthatches a shy, European Green Woodpecker, and the delightful Ehrenberg's (Common) Redstart, our main target was nowhere to be seen. We then headed into Akseki, bought some lunch and spent the rest of the afternoon exploring some other nice areas and admiring the scenery. At one spot we found another fine male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, whilst at another, we were delighted and relieved to find several newly arrived and feisty Olive-tree Warblers, a much wanted species and a good catch-up. More smart Cretzschmar's Buntings and Western Rock Nuthatches (including at the nest) were also admired.



This page, some great woodpeckers: female White-backed Woodpecker (Lilford's), and male Middle-spotted Woodpecker (above) and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (left). Opposite page, three scarily similar warblers: top Olive-tree Warbler, left Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, and the localized Upcher's Warbler.





A fabulous male Red-backed Shrike.

We then headed back to the coast for another look around. Upon arrival, three hovering falcons turned out to be two Lesser Kestrels and a Red-footed Falcon, and we spent some time admiring this trio. We also saw lots of migrant shrikes, including some stunning Red-backed Shrikes and more Lesser Grey Shrikes, and also enjoyed some fabulous views of Little Bitterns. It was a thoroughly fine afternoon!

We headed back to the high pine zone early the following morning, arriving under gorgeous blue skies. We once again had the difficult task of finding the rare *lilfordi* form of White-backed Woodpecker, and to be honest, after our initial failure, I wasn't too optimistic. We tried hard again, once more without success, and then moved on to another valley. Again nothing, but then, near the end of our walk, a sudden response, and amazingly we were soon enjoying great looks at a female of this seldom seen form. A scorpion, more Sombre Tits and our first Woodlarks added interest, but we had a lot of road ahead of us, and needed to get moving!



A 2cy male Lesser Kestrel (left) and a 2cy male Red-footed Falcon hunting together.



The lovely Finsch's Wheatear, flying and perched.

It was still a long drive to Nigde, and of course we had a stop or two to make. At the first stop we enjoyed a fine hepatic Common Cuckoo, an excellent Ortolan Bunting and, better still, a stunning male Finsch's Wheatears. Continuing on we paused for a fine lunch, noting a large circling flock of Great White Pelicans overhead! We also did a little birding that afternoon around Nigde, where there were a few waterbirds, best of which were a confiding group of Great White Pelicans! Pelicans were obviously on the move that day!

We had an early start the following day! And it was horribly early! We met up with my friend Hassan and had a cup of coffee and some cake at his house before transferring vehicles and heading up the mountain. Certainly less effort than the old days when we used to walk up Demirkazik, and far easier to arrive nice and early! However, there had been a fair amount of fresh snow, and after a while, even the trusty tractor ground to a halt! There was no alternative other than get off the trailer and use our legs to get a little further. Fortunately, for



Some of the Great White Pelicans at Nigde.



A fine Radde's Accentor, and spot the Caspian Snowcock! Both at Demirkazik.



us, the snow had not only kept us lower, but had also forced some of the birds a little lower too! After a short ascent, it was a fairly level and easy walk. The weather was lovely, the views astounding and the temperatures a little on the cool side! Soon we were hearing the curlew-like calls of the Caspian Snowcocks and before too long we had several of these stunners posing in the scope, albeit a little distantly! Plenty of other smart birds were on offer too, and these included the much wanted Radde's Accentor in the snow, as well as White-winged Snowfinches, and we also noted numerous Bezoar (Persian Ibex) clambering around on the mountain slopes! Heading back down we found some fine Alpine Accentors, several lovely Black Redstarts, and more brilliant Finsch's Wheatears. On the way back to our vans we also saw an interesting 2cy male Montagu's Harrier and a Wallcreeper for some.

After a late breakfast, we explored a nearby gulley where the numerous rock climbers did not help our chances of finding another Wallcreeper. We did however find a fine Golden Eagle and some interesting and confiding Lesser Whitethroats. We then tried other areas and despite much effort, only managed Calandra Lark (rather than the hoped-for Bimaculated), Tawny Pipits, a surprise Icterine Warbler, numerous Rock Sparrows and a hunting Red



A lovely backlit Squacco Heron and a stunning male Citrine Wagtail from Sultan Sazligi.





A smart Collared Pratincole.

Fox. Nevertheless, it had been a great day, and we returned to our hotel tired but happy with our achievements.

The following morning we headed to the extensive Sultan Sazligi marshes. We began at the excellent boardwalk, seeking out a few more goodies. Here, several *mimicus* Moustached Warblers showed very well, as did Bearded Reedlings, Savi's Warblers and ridiculous numbers of Squacco and Purple Heron! The bill on the local form of Reed Bunting needed to be seen to be believed, and we enjoyed some great experiences with White-headed Ducks and a stunning pair of Citrine Wagtails. A good variety of shorebirds, including some smart breeding plumaged Spotted Redshanks, and some showy Red-crested Pochards were also appreciated. Some nearby plains were then explored, adding Turkestan Short-toed Larks, and some confiding Collared Pratincoles, but not the hoped-for Greater Sandplover, despite an extensive search!

We then continued and took a road up to high altitude, enjoying more spectacular scenery. Here we found many of the high altitude species again, including more confiding Radde's Accentors and White-winged Snowfinches, as well as showy Crag Martins and White-throated Robins, but much searching failed to yield anything else new. We retraced our steps and made the long journey to Gaziantep. We decided to take the shorter direct route, rather than the fast route, and this proved to be interesting. The roads were surprisingly small and rural, but incredibly scenic with shrikes of various species seemingly on every wire and every bush!! We even bumped into a brilliant and showy Great Spotted Cuckoo, our only one of the trip. We arrived in Gaziantep just



Our only Great Spotted Cuckoo of the tour.



The subtle but stunning eastern form of Cinereous Bunting.

after dark, and found our hotel.

The following day, we explored some low hills near to Gaziantep. At the first spot we set off and soon found singing Upcher's Warblers, the first of our targets in the area. Gorgeous eastern Cinereous Buntings showed brilliantly, superb Desert Finches copulated in front of us, Syrian Woodpeckers posed, and we were delighted to find both the hoped for Eastern and Western Rock Nuthatches attending nests. Bimaculated Larks displayed and showed well, and, numerous wheatears included more Eastern Black-eared, Isabelline and stunning Finsch's Wheatears. Other species noted during the morning included plenty of lovely Woodchat Shrikes, more Sombre Tits and more smart Eastern Orphean Warblers. We were also somewhat surprised to find a singing male Menetries's Warbler which showed nicely. In the afternoon we explored another valley with similar results. More nuthatches with both rock nuthatches seen side-by-side, confiding Cinereous Buntings, Long-legged Buzzards just overhead and many more familiar friends, but nothing else new!



Eastern (left) and Western Rock Nuthatches.



An Iraq Babbler from Birecik.

We were up early the next morning and heading east to Birecik. We began in some wadis where the semi-captive Northern Bald Ibises breed and were conspicuous, and where more Menetries's Warblers were soon apparent. The landscape had been heavily modified since my previous visit, but we made a strategy, and soon had the hoped-for See-see Partridge teed up in the scope. A fine start, and moving on we paused to watch a small colony of Little Swifts before heading to a huge are of wetlands on the opposite side of the river. Here, Iraq Babblers proved to be common, as did smart Dead Sea Sparrows, and the wetlands held good numbers of Pygmy Cormorants and a few Pied Kingfishers, as well as more Delicate Prinias and a variety of waterbirds. We then moved to another area where we eventually found a very cute Pallid Scops Owl, a fabulous creature, as well as White-spectacled Bulbuls and, on the river, some showy Ferruginous Ducks.



A fine male Dead Sea Sparrow from Birecik.

After a cold drink, and with most of the hoped-for species already seen, we decided to head further east. At our first stop, we soon found more See-see Partridges, some much-wanted singing Pale Rockfinches and, a surprise in the form of some rather rufescent and distinctive Mediterranean Short-toed Larks. We then embarked upon a longish drive further east to a small village where, once the rain abated, we watched up to 50 superb Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters settling down at their colony. After a very efficient clean-up, we headed back to Birecik in good time for dinner.

We had one final look for Kurdish Wheatear on the last morning. We enjoyed many of our old friends again, and admired the scenery, but alas, no wheatear. It was then time to head for Adana for the conclusion of the tour. But, with a little time on our hands, we were not done yet! We headed for a river where after a brief search we were watching the smart White-throated Kingfisher. It was really warming up now, and pleased with our final addition to the list, we headed to the airport. It had been a brilliant trip, one where the birds really did never stop coming, right up until the final moments! We did really well, and thanks to a great group, we had a lot of fun.



A lovely drake Ferruginous Duck from Birecik.



The smashing Pallid Scops Owl

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

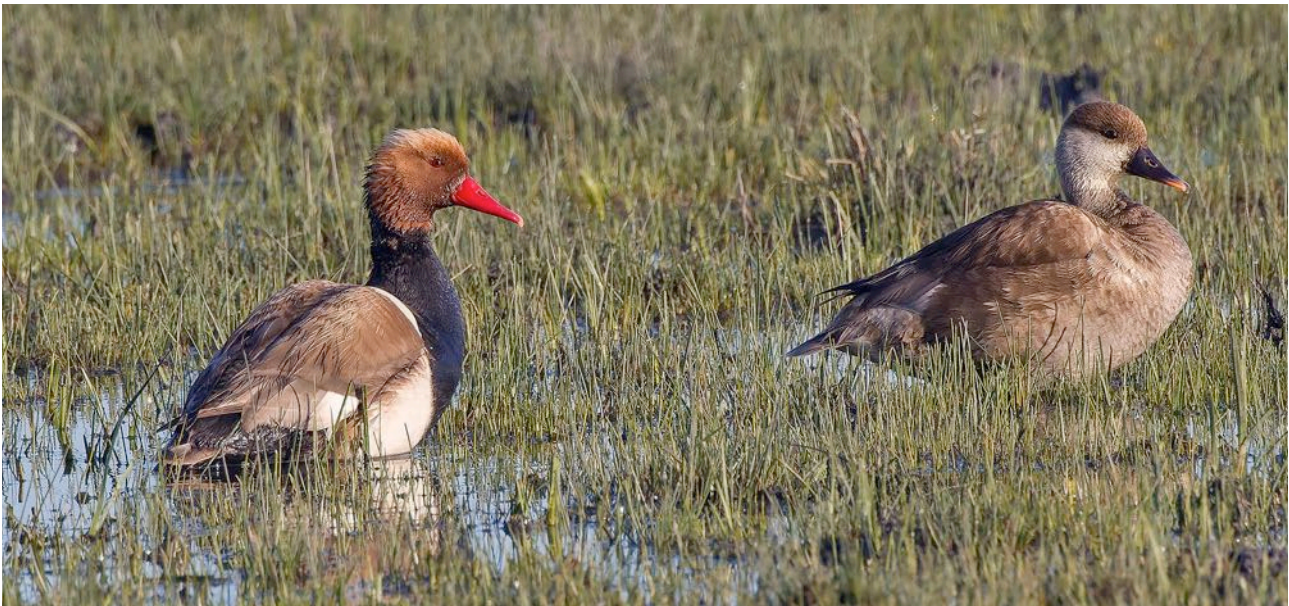
Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

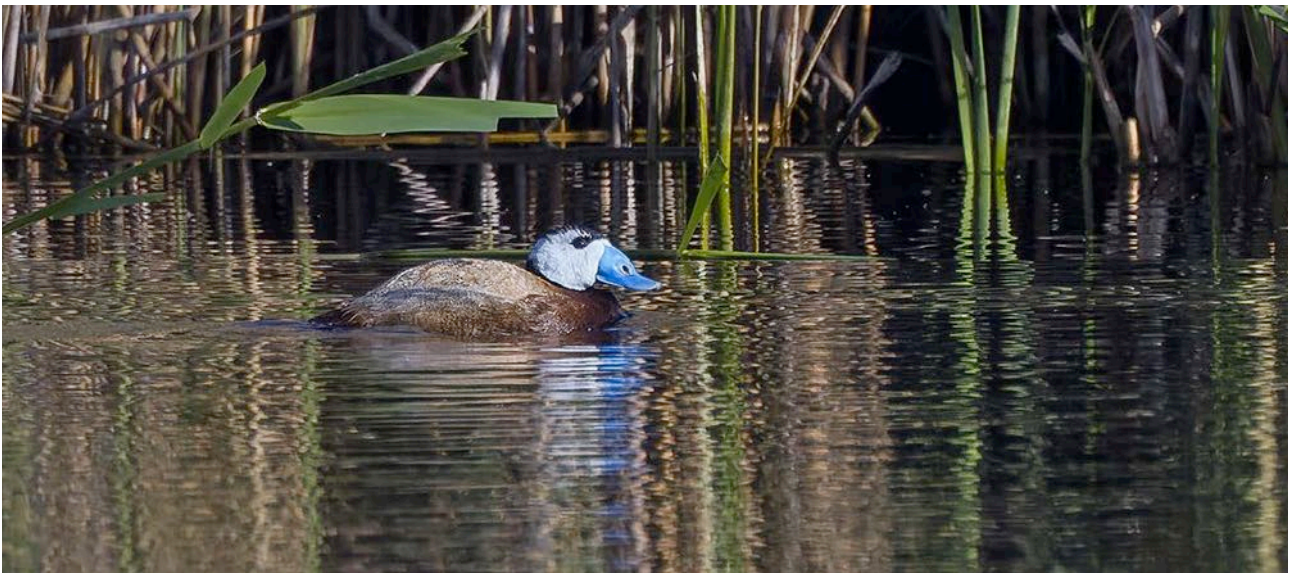
Abbreviations used in the species comments: G = Georgia; C = Cyprus; T = Turkey

For polytypic species, the subspecies seen on the tour, where known, is placed in parentheses at the end of the species comment. Generally, species listed with trinomials are not currently split by the IOC.

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P.(Eds). **2022. IOC World Bird List (v12.2)**. This list is updated twice annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>. Please note, this was the current version when the report checklist was created. Some alternative names are given in parentheses.



A pair of Red-crested Pochards and a male White-headed Duck from Sultan Sazligi.



- Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* Several seen in the wetlands at Sultan Sazligi [*rubrirostris*].
- Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* Small numbers in the salt pans near Acigol.
- Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* First at Kumisi Reservoir (G), and at several wetlands in Turkey.
- Garganey** *Spatula querquedula* A few seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey, with several fine drakes.
- Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata* A few seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey. Ducklings at Kuprulu (C), a surprise!
- Gadwall** *Mareca strepera* A couple seen at Kuprulu Wetlands (C).
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* A few seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominated].
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta* A pair seen at Kuprulu Wetlands (C).
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* Just a few, the first at Akkaya Baraji, Nigde (T).
- Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* A pair seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G) and great views of 20+ at Sultan Sazligi (T).
- Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina* Seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey, with largest numbers in Turkey.
- Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Great views in several wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey, with some cracking drakes.
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* Three seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G).
- White-headed Duck** ♦ *Oxyura leucocephala* A Great views of a 2 drakes and a duck in the wetlands at Sultan Sazligi (T).
- Caucasian Grouse** ♦ *Lyrurus mlokosiewiczii* Great views daily, inc. several displaying males, around Stepantsminda (G).
- Black Francolin** *Francolinus francolinus* A few seen well on Cyprus; heard and seen briefly at Birecik (T) [nominated].
- Caucasian Snowcock** ♦ *Tetraogallus caucasicus* Great scope views on three dates around Stepantsminda (G).
- Caspian Snowcock** ♦ *Tetraogallus caspius* Excellent scope views of at least 4 at Demirkazik (T) [*tauricus*].



A See-see Partridge in habitat.

- See-see Partridge** ◊ *Ammoperdix griseogularis* Great scope views at Birecik and also seen well at Yeniakpinar (T).
- Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* (H) One heard briefly near to Kumisi Reservoir.
- Chukar Partridge (Chukar)** *Alectoris chukar* A few on Cyprus [*cypriones*], and more in Turkey [*kurdestanica*].
- European Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus* A singing male seen very well above our hotel near to Girne [*meridionalis*].
- Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba* Good numbers in Georgia, a few in Cyprus and just in Gaziantep (T) [nominate].
- Common Swift** *Apus apus* Very common and widespread [nominate].
- Little Swift** *Apus affinis* Several seen well along the river at Birecik (T) [*galilejensis*].
- Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* Excellent views of a roadside bird on the journey to Demirkazik (T).
- Common Cuckoo (Eurasian C)** *Cuculus canorus* First seen around Stepantsminda (G), and a few in Turkey [nominate].
- Rock Dove (R Pigeon)** *Columba livia* Wild looking birds in the mountains of Georgia and Turkey [nominate].
- Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* A couple in flight near to Izmir (T) [nominate].
- Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* Common and widespread [nominate].
- European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur* Small numbers of migrants daily on Cyprus, and a few in Turkey [nominate].
- Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* Common and widespread.
- Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis* Three subspecies: *cambayensis* (G); nominate (C); *phoenicophila* (T).
- Water Rail** ◊ *Rallus aquaticus* (H) Heard in the wetlands at Sultan Sazligi (T) [nominate].
- Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* Small numbers at several wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
- Eurasian Coot (Common C)** *Fulica atra* Widespread in wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
- Common Crane** *Grus grus* One seen migrating over the Gergeti Trinity Church at Stepantsminda (G).
- Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Seen in Georgia [*albescens*], and Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
- Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* Small numbers at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
- Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus* 50+ at Kuprulu Wetlands (C), and at several wetlands in Turkey.
- Eurasian Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oediconemus* Great views on Cyprus. First at the Kormakitis Peninsula [*saharae*].
- Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* Small numbers at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.
- Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* Small numbers in the salt pans near Acigol.
- Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* Small numbers in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey
- Spur-winged Lapwing** *Vanellus spinosus* Small numbers at several wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey.
- Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* A summer plumaged adult seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G) [nominate].
- Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* c20 present at Kuprulu Wetlands (C).
- Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* Small numbers at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [*curonicus*].
- Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus* A few seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G) and one in S. Turkey for some [nominate].
- Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* Singles at Kumisi Reservoir (G) and Manavgat Estuary (T) [nominate].
- Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* One seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G) [nominate].
- Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* One seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G) [nominate].
- Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* A couple seen at the Manavgat Estuary (T) [nominate].
- Ruff** *Calidris pugnax* Widespread in wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* A few scoped at Kuprulu Wetlands (C), and at a couple of sites in Turkey.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* At least three seen at Haspolat Sewage Ponds (C), with some excellent views.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* One seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G) [centralis].

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* A few at Haspolat Sewage Ponds and 100s at Kuprulu Wetlands (C), and 1 at Burdur Golu (T).

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* One seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G) [nominate].

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* Distant birds at Kumisi Reservoir (G), and at Burdur Golu (T).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Small numbers at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* One seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G).

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Widespread in wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* A couple of crackers seen in the wetlands at Sultan Sazligi (T).

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Small numbers at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* A few in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey. Best at Sultan Sazligi (T) [nominate].

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei* A few seen distantly at Burdur Golu (T).

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* A few at both Tbilisi and Kumisi Reservoirs (G).

Audouin's Gull ♦ *Ichthyæetus audouinii* Great views of 2 or 3 at Cape Andreas, at the tip of the Karpaz Peninsula (C).

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* A few seen at Tbilisi Reservoir (G).

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* Common along the costs of Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

Armenian Gull ♦ *Larus armenicus* Good numbers and great views at Tbilisi Reservoir (G).

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Baltic G) *Larus [fuscus] fuscus* A few at Tbilisi Reservoir (G) and 1 at the Manavgat Estuary (T).

Lesser Black-backed Gull (Heuglin's G) *Larus [fuscus] heuglini* 5+ seen at Tbilisi Reservoir (G). Mostly subadults.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* c6 seen at Kumisi Reservoir (G).

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* Three seen at Tbilisi Reservoir (G).

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Singles at Tbilisi and Kumisi Reservoirs (G).

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* A few at Kumisi Reservoir (G) and at wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

White-winged Tern (W-w Black T) *Chlidonias leucopterus* A great flock of c400 at Kumisi Reservoir (G). A few in Turkey.

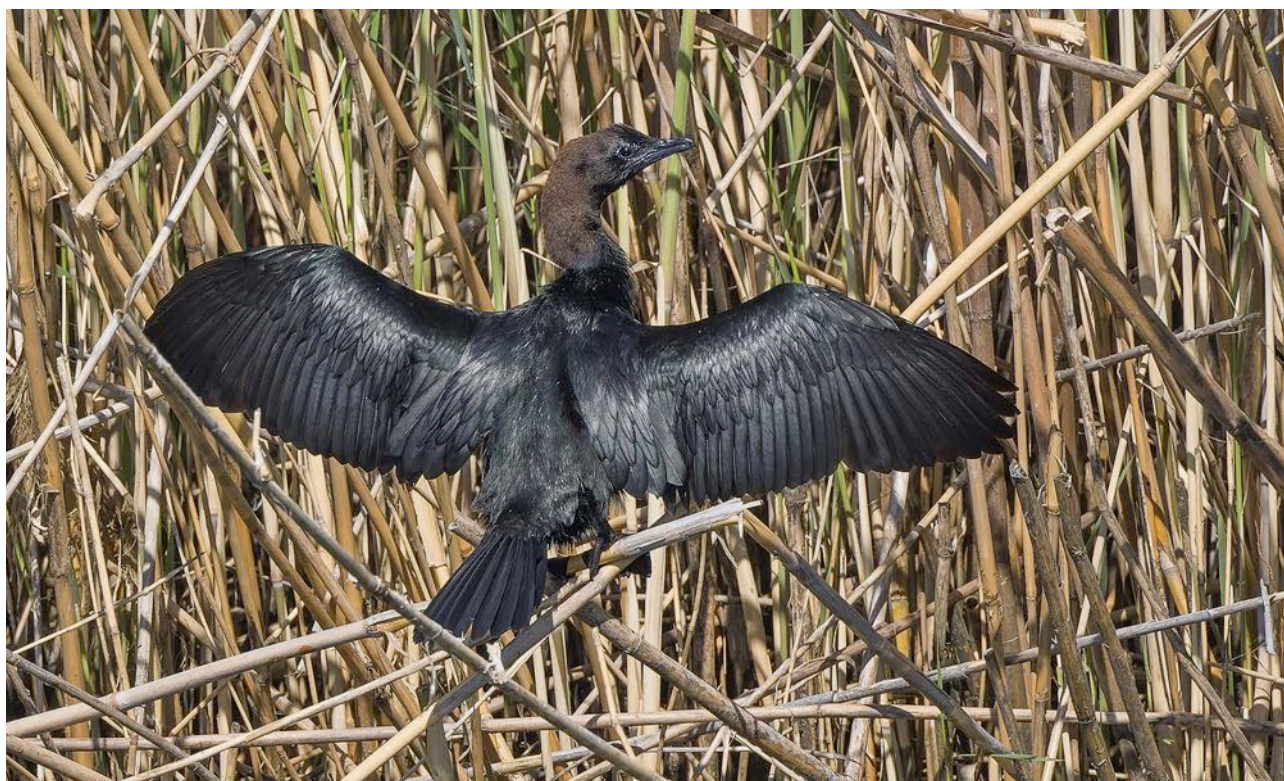
Scopoli's Shearwater ♦ *Calonectris diomedea* A few off Cape Andreas, at the tip of the Karpaz Peninsula (C).

Yelkouan Shearwater ♦ *Puffinus yelkouan* Best were the 3 or 4 seen off the Kormakitis Peninsula (C).

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* A total of about 7 seen, the first in flight at Pamukkale (T).

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* A few seen well on Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

Pygmy Cormorant ♦ *Microcarbo pygmaeus* Very common around the gravel pits and along the river at Birecik (T).



A fine Pygmy Cormorant from Birecik.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* A few at Tbilisi Reservoir (G) and in eastern Turkey [*sinensis*].

European Shag *Gulosus aristotelis* Good views of the scarce form *desmarestii* off the Cyprus coast.

Northern Bald Ibis ◊ (semi-captive) *Geronticus eremita* Great views of 200+ around Birecik (T).

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Small numbers at wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Small numbers at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Many great looks, particularly at the Manavgat Estuary and Birecik (T).



One of many lovely Little Bitterns seen.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* One in Tbilisi (G), and at wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* Some stunning views at wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey.
Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* A few in Georgia and good numbers in Cyprus and Turkey.
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Small numbers at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Two on Cyprus and more in Turkey, inc. good numbers at Sultan Sazligi [nominate].
Great Egret (G White E) *Ardea alba* A few near Tbilisi (G), and more in Turkey [nominate].
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Present at wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* c80 seen circling on the drive to Nigde, and 40+ at Akkaya Baraji, Nigde (T).
Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* Brilliant views on several occasions around Stepantsminda (G).



Another amazing view of a Bearded Vulture!

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* One near Kumisi Reservoir (G), and a few in Turkey [nominate].

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* A few seen migrating in Georgia, and a few seen in Turkey.

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* Good numbers seen around Stepantsminda (G).

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* One seen at Stepantsminda (G).

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* A migrant at Stepantsminda (G), and regular sightings in Turkey [nominate].

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina* One seen flying over the mountains near to Yahyali (T).

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus* A few seen, the first a dark phase bird near to Cemerler, near to Akseki (T).

Eastern Imperial Eagle \diamond *Aquila heliaca* Brilliant views of a breeding pair near to Kumisi Reservoir (G).

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Seen at Stepantsminda (G) [nominate] and Demirkazik (T) [*homeyeri*].

Bonelli's Eagle *Aquila fasciata* A

Levant Sparrowhawk \diamond *Accipiter brevipes* We were pleased to see a few migrating north over Stepantsminda (G).

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* Small numbers seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* A couple seen well around Stepantsminda (G) [*marginatus*].

Western Marsh Harrier (Eurasian M H) *Circus aeruginosus* Small numbers in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* A fine male, and a couple of others, seen migrating over Stepantsminda (G).

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* Small numbers, and some great views, in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* A few migrants over Stepantsminda (G), and a few seen in Turkey [nominate].

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Good views of an adult at Kumisi Reservoir (G) [nominate].

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* Just one in Cyprus and many great views in Turkey [nominate].

Common Buzzard (Steppe B) *Buteo [buteo] vulpinus* Plenty over Stepantsminda (G), and a few residents in Turkey [*menetriesi*].



Griffon Vulture, 2cy Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Long-legged Buzzard.





A European Scops Owl peers out from under the rafters!

- Little Owl *Athene noctua*** A couple seen, including one at Sultan Sazligi (T) [*indigena*].
- Little Owl** ◊ (Lilith O) *Athene [noctua] lilith* Several seen, the first by our hotel in Girne (C).
- Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops*** One seen well after the fish owl excursion (T) [*cycladum*].
- Cyprus Scops Owl** ◊ *Otus cypricus* Great views of one in daylight west of Girne, and another at night near our hotel (C).
- Pallid Scops Owl** ◊ (Striated S O) *Otus brucei* A Brilliant views of a stunner in the tea gardens at Birecik (T) [*obsoletus*].
- Brown Fish Owl** ◊ (Turkish B F O) *Ketupa [zeylonensis] semenowi* Excellent views of one near to Akseki (T).
- Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*** (H) Heard near to the Zhinvali Reservoir, between Tbilisi and Stepantsminda (G) [*willkenskii*].
- Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*** Small numbers in Georgia and throughout Turkey [nominate].
- European Roller *Coracias garrulus*** Small numbers seen well in Cyprus and in much of Turkey [nominate].
- White-throated Kingfisher (W-breasted K) *Halcyon smyrnensis*** Great views of near Antalya on the last day (T) [nominate].
- Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*** (H) One heard north of Tbilisi [nominate].
- Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*** A few seen around the gravel pits at Birecik (T) [*syriacus*].
- Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*** Stunning views of 50+ at a colony near Bosova (T) [nominate].
- European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*** Seen throughout with huge and impressive numbers migrating on Cyprus.
- Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocoptes medius*** Great views of several in the Akseki area (T) [*anatoliae*].
- Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*** A few seen well, the first at Isikli near to Gaziantep (T) [nominate].
- Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*** A few in woodland between Tbilisi and Stepantsminda (G) [*tenuirostris*].
- White-backed Woodpecker** ◊ (Lilford's W) *Dendrocopos [leucotos] lilfordi* Great views of a female near Akseki (T).
- European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*** One seen and others heard near to Akseki (T). Surprisingly shy! [*karelini*].
- Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*** Female and 2cy male seen well, with a Red-footed Falcon, at the Manavgat Estuary (T).
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*** Small numbers seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
- Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*** A 2cy male seen well, with Lesser Kestrels, at the Manavgat Estuary (T).
- Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*** A fabulous pale phase adult seen over the Kormakitis Peninsula (C).
- Merlin *Falco columbarius*** (NL) One briefly seen at Stepantsminda (G).
- Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*** A few seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey, the first at Kumisi Reservoir (G) [nominate].
- Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*** Singles at Stepantsminda (G) and Pamukkale (T) [*brookei*].
- Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*** Several in Cyprus and common in Turkey where many migrants were grounded.
- Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*** Good numbers seen, many well, the first at the Manavgat Estuary (T).
- Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*** A male seen on Cyprus and then common in much of Turkey [*niloticus*].
- Masked Shrike** ◊ *Lanius nubicus* A male seen on Cyprus and then many stunners seen in Turkey.



A lovely European Bee-eater, a fine Eurasian Hobby (left) and a light-morph Eleonora's Falcon.



- Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus* A couple on Cyprus and a few at scattered sites on Turkey.
- Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* A few in Georgia [*krynickyi*], and several smart *anatoliae* seen in Turkey.
- Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica* Common and widespread throughout [nominate].
- Red-billed Chough** *Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax* Many seen around Stepantsminda (G) and Demirkazik (T) [*docilis*].
- Alpine Chough (Yellow-billed C)** *Pyrhacorax graculus* Seen at Stepantsminda (G) [nominate] and Demirkazik (T) [*digitatus*].
- Western Jackdaw (Eurasian J)** *Coloeus monedula* Common on Cyprus and a few in Turkey [*soemmerringii*].
- Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* A couple seen near to Stepantsminda (G) and on the high plateau in Turkey [nominate].
- Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* Fairly common and widespread. Two forms: *sharpii* (G), *pallescens* (C and T).
- Northern Raven** *Corvus corax* Seen in Georgia [nominate], and Cyprus and Turkey [*laurencei*].
- Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* A few seen in Georgia [*michalowskii*] and common in the mountains of Turkey [nominate].
- Sombre Tit** ◊ *Poecile lugubris* Several seen well, the first near to Akseki (T) [*anatoliae*].
- Eurasian Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* Seen in the woodlands of Georgia and Turkey [*satunini*].
- Great Tit** *Parus major* Those seen in Georgia and Turkey were the nominate form, with *aphrodite* seen on Cyprus.
- Eurasian Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* (H) Heard briefly a couple of times in Turkey.



A lovely male Woodchat Shrike, European Roller and a male Lesser Grey Shrike.



Bearded Reedling (B Tit) *Panurus biarmicus* Great views from the boardwalk at Sultan Sazligi (T) [*russicus*].

Woodlark *Lullula arborea* A few seen well, the first on wires near to Akseki (T) [*pallida*].

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* Four subspecies: *caucasica* (G); *cyprica* (C); *zion* (south T); *subtaurica* (T).

Horned Lark (Shore L) *Eremophila alpestris* Great views of many in the mountains of Georgia and Turkey [*pencillata*].

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* Four forms: *artemisiana* (G); nominate (C); *woltersi* (east T); *hermonensis* (T).

Bimaculated Lark ♦ ***Melanocorypha bimaculata*** Great views of singing birds at Isikli (T).

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* Three subspecies: nominate (G and C); *hebraica* (T); *gaza* (southeast T).

Mediterranean Short-toed Lark *Alaudala rufescens* Great views of singing birds at Yeniakpinar, near Birecik (T) [*minor*].

Turkestan Short-toed Lark ♦ ***Alaudala heinei*** Many seen well in the plains near to Sultan Sazligi (T) [*heinei*].

White-spectacled Bulbul ♦ **(Yellow-vented B) *Pycnonotus xanthopygus*** A few seen well, especially around Side (T).



Some of the larks seen during the tour, clockwise from top left: Mediterranean Short-toed Lark; Turkestan Short-toed Lark; Bimaculated Lark; Horned Lark; Crested Lark and Calandra Lark





A female Bearded Reedling and a lovely Red-rumped Swallow.



Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia* Seen in wetlands in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Seen around Stepantsminda (G) and at a few sites in Turkey.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Common throughout [nominate].

Common House Martin (Northern H M) *Delichon urbicum* Seen throughout, mostly *urbicum* and perhaps *meridionale* (T).

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Small numbers throughout, with some great views [*rufula*].

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* First seen at Kuprulu Wetlands (C). Many others heard in Turkey [*orientalis*].

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* Two forms: the excellent *major* at Stepantsminda (G) and *tephronotus* at Akseki (T).

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* A couple including a surprise bird near to Akseki (T).

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler ◊ (Balkan W) *Phylloscopus orientalis* Great views of several near to Akseki (T).

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* Pale migrants were may be *acredula* (G). Possibly nominate birds in Turkey.

Mountain Chiffchaff ◊ (Caucasian C) *Phylloscopus [sindianus] lorenzii* Many seen well at Stepantsminda (G).

Green Warbler ◊ (Bright G W) *Phylloscopus nitidus* A singing male seen in woodland on the way to Stepantsminda (G).

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* A few seen well at wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey.

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* Excellent views of several singing birds at Sultan Sazligi (T).

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* A couple seen, including a migrant on the Kormakitis Peninsula (C).

Eurasian Reed Warbler ◊ (Caspian R W) *Acrocephalus [scirpaceus] fuscus* Seen at some wetlands in Cyprus and Turkey.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* A singing bird in Cyprus and several more seen well in Turkey.

Upcher's Warbler ◊ *Hippolais languida* Brilliant views of several in the southeast. First seen at Isikli near Gaziantep (T).

Olive-tree Warbler ◊ *Hippolais olivetorum* Brilliant views of a couple of singing males near to Akseki (T).

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* A single migrant seen well, but relatively briefly, near to Demirkazik (T).

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* Excellent views of two singing birds in the wetlands at Sultan Sazligi (T) [*fusca*].

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* A few seen well, the first on the Kormakitis Peninsula [*neuroticus*].

Delicate Prinia ◊ *Prinia lepida* First seen at the Manavgat Estuary, then better views at the gravel pits at Birecik [*akyildizi*].

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* Seen in Georgia and Turkey [*dammholzi*] and in Cyprus [nominate].

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* A couple seen, one at Side and one at Demirkazik (T).

Barred Warbler *Curruca nisoria* Elusive migrants seen on Cyprus and much better views at sites in Turkey [nominate].

Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca* Seen in all three parts of the tour. Best views around Demirkazik [nominate].

Eastern Orphean Warbler ◊ *Curruca crassirostris* Plenty seen well, the first good views at Pamukkale (T) [nominate].

Menetries's Warbler ◊ *Curruca mystacea* Great views of a male at Isikli, and a few more around Birecik (T) [*rubescens*].



The localized Menetries's Warbler.

Rüppell's Warbler ◊ *Curruca ruppeli* Several seen well, the first, a stunning male, near to Acigol (T).
Cyprus Warbler ◊ *Curruca melanothorax* Several seen very well, the first along the Alevkaya Forest road (C).
Sardinian Warbler *Curruca melanocephala* Common and widespread, first seen along the Alevkaya Forest road (C).
Common Whitethroat *Curruca communis* A couple on Cyprus and a few in Turkey [*icterops*].
Spectacled Warbler *Curruca conspicillata* Seen well on the Kormakitis Peninsula and near Kuprulu Wetlands (C) [nominate].
Iraq Babbler ◊ *Argya altirostris* Brilliant views of several at the gravel pits at Birecik (T).
Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* A few seen in the high coniferous forests near to Akseki (T) [*buturlini*].
Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Heard on Cyprus [*hyrcanus*] and seen well at Demirkazik (T) [*cypriones*].
Krüper's Nuthatch ◊ *Sitta krueperi* Many brilliant views in the Akseki area (T).



A smart male Krüper's Nuthatch.

Western Rock Nuthatch ◊ *Sitta neumayer* Many great views, the first at Pamukkale [nominate].
Eastern Rock Nuthatch ◊ (Great R N) *Sitta tephronota* Several seen well in the Gaziantep area [*dresseri*].
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* One seen in woodland on the way to Stepantsminda (G) [*caucasica*].
Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* Elusive. Heard and seen by some at Stepantsminda (G) and Demirkazik (T) [nominate].
Eurasian Treecreeper (Common T) *Certhia familiaris* Form *caucasica* at Stepantsminda (G); nominate heard at Akseki (T).
Rosy Starling (Rose-coloured S) *Pastor roseus* An amazing flock of 500+ at Kumisi Reservoir. A superb experience (G).
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Form *causicus* in Georgia, *tauricus* in Turkey.
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* Heard and seen briefly near to Stepantsminda (G) [nominate].
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* A few seen around Stepantsminda (G) and Demirkazik (T) [nominate].
Common Blackbird (Eurasian B) *Turdus merula* Common and widespread in Georgia and Turkey [*aterrimus*].
Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* Plenty around Stepantsminda (G) and a few at Demirkazik (T) [*amicorum*].
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (R Bush R) *Cercotrichas galactotes* A few seen well, first at the Manavgat Estuary (T) [*familiaris*].
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* A few on Cyprus and seen regularly in Turkey [*neumannii*].
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* One seen in woodland on the way to Stepantsminda (G) [*causicus*].
Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* A few heard and one seen (prob. this spp.) at the Birecik gravel pits (T) [nominate].
White-throated Robin ◊ *Irania gutturalis* Several great views of this stunner, the first at Acigol (T).
Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* Great views of a singing male and a female near Zhinvali Reservoir (G).
Semicollared Flycatcher ◊ *Ficedula semitorquata* An elusive 2cy male in woodland near to the Zhinvali Reservoir (G).
European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* A female seen well on the Kormakitis Peninsula (C).
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Plenty around Stepantsminda (G) and Demirkazik (T) [nominate].



Rufous Scrub-Robin and the localized Pale Rockfinch



- Common Redstart** ◊ (Ehrenberg's R) *Phoenicurus [phoenicurus] samamisticus* Recorded on all 3 legs. Best at Akseki (T).
- Common Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* Great views of fine males around Stepantsminda (G) and Demirkazik (T).
- Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* A singing male on Cyprus and a few in Turkey [*longirostris*].
- Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* Small numbers of migrants seen in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.
- European Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola* First seen at Stepantsminda (G), and a few near to Yahyali (T) [nominate].
- Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* Plenty around Stepantsminda (G) [nominate], and Demirkazik (T) [*libanotica*].
- Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* Excellent views on the plains near to Tbilisi (G) and much of Turkey.
- Eastern Black-eared Wheatear** ◊ *Oenanthe melanoleuca* Great views of small numbers in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey.
- Cyprus Wheatear** ◊ (C Pied W) *Oenanthe cypriaca* Several seen very well, first at the Alevkaya Forest road (C).
- Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* A fine 2cy male (possibly with some hybrid genes) seen very well at Pamukkale (T).
- Finsch's Wheatear** ◊ *Oenanthe finschii* Several of these stunners at various sites, the first at Meke Golu [*barnesi*].
- White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* A pair seen on the journey between Tbilisi and Stepantsminda [*caucasicus*].
- Pale Rockfinch** ◊ *Carpospiza brachydactyla* Brilliant views of a couple of singing males at Yeniakpinar near Birecik (T).
- Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia* Good views near to Tbilisi (G), and a few sites in Turkey [*exigua*].



Mating Desert Finches and a fine male Ortolan Bunting.

- White-winged Snowfinch** *Montifringilla nivalis* 30+ forced down by snow at Demirkazik and seen well near Yahyali (T) [*leucura*].
- Yellow-throated Sparrow (Chestnut-shouldered S)** *Gymnoris xanthocollis* A couple seen well at Birecik (T).
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* Seen near to Tbilisi Reservoir (G) and at Sultan Sazligi (T) [*transcaucasicus*].
- Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* Widespread. Two forms: *transcaspius* (G and T) and nominate (C).
- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* Three subspecies: nominate (G); *biblicus* (C and SE T); *balearoibericus* (rest of T).
- Dead Sea Sparrow** ♦ *Passer moabiticus* Brilliant views of several at the gravel pits at Birecik (T) [nominate].
- Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris* Seen high up at Stepantsminda (G), and well at Demirkazik (T) [*montana*].
- Radde's Accentor** ♦ *Prunella ocularis* Brilliant views of one at Demirkazik and a couple near to Yahyali (T) [nominate].
- Dunnock (Hedge Accentor)** *Prunella modularis* A few seen in the Stepantsminda (Kazbegi) area [*obscura*].
- Western Yellow Wagtail (Yellow-headed W)** *Motacilla flava lutea* Two stunning males at Stepantsminda (G).
- Western Yellow Wagtail (Blue-headed W)** *Motacilla [flava] flava* A few showing characters of this form on all 3 legs.
- Western Yellow Wagtail (Sykes's W)** *Motacilla [flava] beema* A few showing characters of this form at Stepantsminda (G).
- Western Yellow Wagtail (Black-headed W)** *Motacilla [flava] feldegg* Smart form, seen on Cyprus and Turkey.
- Western Yellow Wagtail (Grey-headed W)** *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi* Males seen at Stepantsminda (G) and on Cyprus.
- Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Brilliant views of a male and a pair in the wetlands at Sultan Sazligi (T) [nominate].
- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* A few seen in Georgia [nominate].
- White Wagtail (White W)** *Motacilla [alba] alba* Seen throughout, birds in Georgia showing characters of 'dukhunensis'.
- Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* A few seen, the first below Demirkazik (T).
- Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* A few in Georgia, including singing bird. Singles in Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].
- Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* Fine summer-plumaged birds at Stepantsminda (G) and Kormakitis Peninsula (C).
- Water Pipit** ♦ (Caucasian W P) *Anthus [spinoletta] coutellii* Seen high up at Stepantsminda (G) and around Demirkazik (T).
- Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* A few in Georgia [nominate] and in Cyprus and Turkey [*syriaca*].
- Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* One seen in woodland near to the Zhinvali Reservoir [*nigricans*].
- Eurasian Bullfinch (Common B)** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (NL) A few seen near to Stepantsminda (G) [*rossikowi*].
- Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* A singing male seen well at Stepantsminda (G) [*kubanensis*].
- Great Rosefinch** ♦ (Caucasian G R) *Carpodacus [rubicilla] rubicilla* Eventually, a flock of 18+ at Stepantsminda (G).
- European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris* Seen in Georgia [*bilkevitchi*] and Turkey and Cyprus [*chlorotica*].
- Desert Finch** *Rhodospiza obsoleta* Great views of several, especially at Isikli near to Gaziantep (T).

Twite (Caucasian T) *Linaria [flavirostris] brevirostris* Many seen well in the mountains around Stepantsminda (G).

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina* Great views at Stepantsminda (G) and at a few sites in Turkey [*bella*].

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* Three forms noted: *colchica* (G); *niediecki* (C); *brevirostris* (T).

Red-fronted Serin ◊ *Serinus pusillus* Great views around Stepantsminda (G) and Demirkazik (T). Stunner.

European Serin *Serinus serinus* Small numbers seen very well on Cyprus and Turkey.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* Common in suitable habitat in Georgia, Cyprus and Turkey [nominate].

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* A few around Stepantsminda (G) [*prageri*], and many around Demirkazik (T) [*hordeij*].

Cinereous Bunting ◊ (Eastern C B) *Emberiza [cineracea] semenowi* Brilliant views of many in the Gaziantep area (T).

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* A few seen, with excellent views of the first at Meke Golu (T).

Cretzschmar's Bunting ◊ *Emberiza caesia* A cracker with many seen very well, the first at Pamukkale (T).

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* Several seen well, the first at Pamukkale (T).

Black-headed Bunting ◊ *Emberiza melanocephala* First seen on Cyprus, then common in much of Turkey.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* Several seen in the wetlands at Sultan Sazligi [*caspia*].



A sharply-marked Red-fronted Serin, Sombre Tit, a fine Isabelline Wheatear and a Sykes's Yellow Wagtail



More favourites... the local Georgian form of Long-tailed Tit, a smart Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, Moustached Warbler and the recently split Delicate Prinia.





A super-cute European Souslik.

MAMMALS

Eastern European Hedgehog (East European H) *Erinaceus concolor* A couple seen near to Akseki (T).

Long-eared Hedgehog *Hemiechinus auritus* A stunner near to our hotel on Cyprus.

Eurasian Lynx *Lynx lynx* Brilliant views of one crossing a mountainside at Stepantsminda (G). Amazing!

Golden Jackal (Common J) *Canis aureus* One seen well in the scope at Kumisi Reservoir (G).

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* Two in Georgia, but best was the hunting animal near to Demirkazik (T).

Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* A mother with two cubs high up in the mountains at Stepantsminda (G). Stunning!

Eurasian Badger *Meles meles* (NL) One for some near to Pamukkale (T).

Bezoar (Ibex) *Capra aegagrus* A few seen well in the Demirkazik area (T).

East Caucasian Tur *Capra cylindricornis* Great views on the mountainsides at Stepantsminda (G).

European Hare (Brown H) *Lepus europaeus* A few seen in Turkey.

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* One seen in Turkey.

Caucasian Squirrel (Persian S) *Sciurus anomalus* A few seen in Turkey in the Akseki area.

European Suslik *Spermophilus citellus* A few seen well in the mountains around Demirkazik. Lovely creatures.



Long-eared Hedgehog, a smart Red Fox, and Bezoar Ibex





A stunning Eastern Festoon, Hermann's Tortoise and a Green Toad from Georgia.



APPENDIX 1

TOP BIRDS OF THE TOUR

- 1st BROWN FISH OWL
- 2nd CAUCASIAN SNOWCOCK
- 3rd BLUE-CHEEKED BEE-EATER
- 4th White-throated Robin
- 5th Finsch's Wheatear
- 6th Great Rosefinch
- 7th Rosy Starling
- 8th Red-fronted Serin

